

Evidence-Tampering In Kennedy Slaying Suspected, D.A. Says

LOS ANGELES (AP). — A probe is under way to determine if anyone tampered with key exhibits used in the trial of the man convicted of killing Sen. Robert F. Kennedy, District Attorney Joseph Busch said Saturday.

He said the investigation seeks to determine if "there has been any intentional or unintentional tampering with the key exhibits involved in the trial — including the murder weapon and the bullets taken from the body of Sen. Kennedy."

There is "evidence the exhibits have been directly handled by numerous persons" in violation of a court order sealing the items, he said. A spokesman for Busch's office declined to say who the persons were.

Sirhan B. Sirhan, a 27-year-old Jordanian, convicted of shooting the New York senator June 5, 1968, at the Ambassador Hotel here, now is on San Quentin Prison's death row.

Busch said investigators learned that the court order sealing the exhibits "had been ignored and... the exhibits have not been properly protected by the county clerk's office."

The investigation announcement came after a report Friday night by television station KNXT here that unauthorized

persons had tampered with key exhibits in Sirhan's 17-week trial.

The station said trial evidence stored in the county clerk's office showed indications that the package seals were broken on the gun used to kill Kennedy, the bullets that killed him and the coat Kennedy was wearing when slain.

Busch said the investigation was prompted by another probe into allegations by Barbara Warner Blehr, a local lawyer, of irregularities in the ballistics investigation of the murder gun.

Mrs. Blehr last May contended that a police ballistics expert, who testified he examined the gun used to kill Kennedy, actually test-fired a weapon other than that used by Sirhan.

Her claim came in a letter to the city Civil Service Commission in which she sought to block appointment of the ballistics expert, DeWayne Wolfer, as permanent head of the Los Angeles Police Department's crime laboratory.

Last month, Theodore Charmach, described by his lawyer as a free-lance investigative reporter, filed a suit which accused Busch, Mayor Sam Yorty and other officials of "deliberately, intentionally and knowingly suppressing facts and evidence" in Kennedy's slaying.